A Brief Account of Tibetan Dogs

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OF
TIBETAN DOGS

The Apso Committee
Tibet House
New Delhi

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On April 11, 1970, the first Tibetan Apso show ever organised with Tibetan judges, was held at Tibet House in New Delhi.

On that occasion the panel of five judges all of whom had owned and bred dogs in Tibet, together with Mr. Lobsang Lhalungpa and the members of the Apso show committee, sat down together and for the first time discussed and recorded their definitions and comments on the various breeds of Tibetan dogs and the standards by which Tibetans judge these breeds.

The judges for this first show were :

Mr. Lobsang Gyaltsen
Mr. Thupten Ninjee
Soko Rimpoche
Mr. T. Samchok
Mr P.T. Takla

The organizers were Mrs. T. D. Gelek, Mrs. Khando Chazotsang, and Miss Marilyn Silverstone.

The result was the following paper delivered by Mr. Lhalungpa at the show.

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The word "apso" means "hairy one". Apsos of the large and small type originated in Central Tibet where the altitude ranges from twelve to sixteen thousand feet. They were generally scattered all over Tibet. The south-eastern areas known as Congpo and Dakpo were known for the Apso-mastiffs, and a third type, the Shakhi—a hunting dog.

Apsos made their appearance in Mongolia probably at the time of Genghis Khan, and in China during the reign of Kublai Khan and the Manchu Emperors, as the result of contacts between them and Tibet.

Apsos were introduced in England in 1904 by Col. Younghusband after his return journey home, having led the military expedition to Tibet. Apsos brought to England by Mrs. Bailey in 1928 aroused an interest which has since been steadily growing.

These dogs were introduced to the United States much later. Mr. C. Suydam Cutting, who was a naturalist and a friend of Theodore Roosevelt, received a pair of Apsos from the 13th Dalai Lama, who had collected the best breed of dogs—both pets and mastiffs.

Tibetan Apsos may have found their way into Russia either direct from Tibet or through Mongolia.

Just before the Second World War a German expedition to Tibet took away specimens of fauna and floral and biological specimens, including many dogs : apsos, mastiffs, Shakhi and even stray dogs !

There is no doubt that Tibetan Apsos are getting more and more popular everywhere.

A close affinity existed between the people of Tibet and their dogs throughout their history. The love of animals is innate in most of them.

The fascination of Tibetans for their animals finds its expression in the pantheon of the ancient Tibetan religion before the advent of Buddhism. The temple banners and frescoes depicted their war-gods with flocks of sheep, herds of yak and hosts of dogs. Behind this lies the human psychology seeking peaceful inter-relationship between them and their gods and their animals.

Even in the Buddhist pantheon each guardian deity is associated with a particular animal which is depicted as an emanated messenger of its divine master. The functional implication for the devotee was that he should not harm the animal without transgressing doubly the precept of non-injury and the pledge to love it.

TYPES OF DOGS

There are three distinct types of Tibetan dogs.

Type 1. Pet Dogs

There are five distinct pet-dog classes in Tibet.

1. Apso - fluffy breed

2. Jemtse Apso - This is the dog known outside Tibet as 'Tibetan Spaniel'. The word 'jemtse' means 'scissored'.

The fur is short with hairy ears and tail.

3. Ursu Apso has thickish hair which is short and rough and a very hairy mouth and beard.

4. Goh-khi is so small that it can sit in a Chinese porcelain bowl. Its body is sleek and it comes from Amdo land. This is the dog known as 'sleeve dog'. The word 'goh' means eagle, and some people still believe that these tiny dogs are found in eagles' nests !

5. Gyakhi (pronounced Gye-khi) is the Pekinese.

There is no such thing as a "prayer dog" despite the popular notion about it abroad. However a pet dog is taught to stand on its hind legs and salute with its front paws.

The breed known as Shihtzu to outsiders is actually of Apso class. They are descendants of those Apsos that were presented to Yuan and Manchu Emperors of China by the ruling elite of Tibet. The name itself is a clear indication of the origin of the breed. 'Shih' in Chinese is identical with the Chinese name for Tibetan whereas 'tzu' means 'class'.

Type II : Mastiffs

The mastiff breed is of three kinds:

1. Dhokhi—sleek type

2. Dhokhi Apso—fluffy mastiff. This is commonly known as the 'Tibetan terrier'.

3. Jemtse Apso Dhokhi—has shorter fur like the smaller Tibetan spaniel.

Mastiff Breed

Mastiff breeds are generally called Dhokhi, meaning outdoor dog. A more figurative term is Gosung Dhokhi—'the guardian at the gate.' They are fearless in their heart, ferocious in their look and terrifying in their voice. The mastiffs are popular with aristocratic people as well as estate farms and nomadic communities. Often they have to fight with wild animals especially bear and leopards that sneak quietly to lift sheep. They can sleep under snow and keep themselves warm. They are tall, strong with a massive

APSOS ; "Nima" and "Singtuk"—owner Miss M. Silverstone

JEMTSE APSO : "Toffy"—owner Lt. Gen. M. M. Khanna

DHOKHI APSO : "Chupi"—owner Mr. Dudley Spain

APSO : "Singdu"— owner Mrs. T. D. Gelek

body and big floppy ears and heavy and loos jaws. Usually they are black with a white blaz on their chest and brown on mouth and legs, an have a curled tail. They can also be grey bu black ones are preferred in Tibet.

Type III: Shakhi

The third distinct breed is Shakhi, the huntin dog, which is also called Congkhi. The syllable Cong derives from the area of Congpo famous for its mastiffs and shakhi dogs.

This breed has some resemblance in build to the Alaskan malamute or the Congo bush dog, although its ears are bigger and pointed and its body thinner and longer. Its hair is sleek, its legs long and its tail well curled. The snowy and milk white are much preferred. There are also light brown, black and parti-coloured dogs.

There is another variety of Shakhi with only the distinction of floppy ears.

The Shakhi is a watch dog and is even used as a sheep-dog as are Dhokhis. It is intelligent, sensitive and takes hardship by travelling with caravans, traders and Tibetan gypsies. Shepherds rely so much on their dog for many things. It drives the flock out into the grazing lands and back to their enclosure. During the day it watches over the whole area and gives warning signals if there is any danger of wild animals—

trying to scare them away. The Shakhi, as sheep-dog, sorts out sheep of its own master that have got mingled with others' flocks.

Despite its name this breed is not so much used for hunting but rather as guard or watch-dog; for hunting even for one's livelihood, is considered by Buddhists to be 'wrong means' as opposed to 'right livelihood'.

Generally, hunting in Tibet was confined to certain nomadic and tribal areas. Hunting was prohibited by special decree issued by the Dalai Lama every year. But even a poor man in Tibet preferred to do anything else except killing. Thus, Tibet was indeed the natural sanctuary for all species of game and birds.

STANDARD

Now back to Apsos. Abroad these seem to be known as Lhasa Apsos although we never call them that in Tibet. Probably this is because the first foreigners to acquire Apsos got them from Lhasa.

Although nothing is formally written about Tibetan standards for these dogs, they are so well known to many of us—the lovers of dogs. The data that we are dealing with are mainly based on oral tradition.

Size : Variable, the smaller ones are considered better by us.

Colour : White is considered best, especially if the hair is silky. Next preferred is parti-coloured followed by all-black. The other colours are golden, sandy, honey dark grey, grizzle and brown. It would be wrong to say that Tibetans prefer golden colour above others.

Hair : The longer the better. Silky is considered the best. After length density comes next in importance. Hair should be soft but not so soft that it gets matted. It should be straight.

Body Shape : The body build and height should be proportional with well developed fore and hind legs and broad chest.

Head : Big with hair over eyes, forehead roundish but broad, not flat.

Mouth : Short muzzle with roundish mouth—not pointed. Lower jaw should not protrude neither should nose be long.

Eyes : Big

Ears :	Heavily feathered with big flaps. Some people prefer matted hair on the ears.
Legs :	Should be short, strong and well-feathered.
Tail :	Well curled over the back.
Character :	Lively, playful, alert and affectionate.

The most prized Apsos are those that have small bodies with long soft coats, broad faces, short muzzles and legs full of hair, carrying a heavy tail well curled over the back. A breed that does not carry its tail over the back in curl is regarded as a bad dog, whereas one that has a tightly curled tail is believed to be faithful to its master. There is even a practice to cut the tip of the tail in order to make the curl stronger. Any dog with white nape and white tipped tail is considered bad, as the traditional saying goes, a white naped one is a bad and strange dog, and the one with the white tipped tail will lose its master. The names given to pet Apsos are such as Senge—the lion, Sentruk, the lion cub. Lion here is 'snow-lion' according to the ancient mythology. It is depicted in thangkas as having white fur and a blue mane. Besides this, names like Dolma, the Goddess liberator and Pema, the lotus, are given to females. Norbu, the jewel

and Tashi, the Blessed one, are names for both males and females.

The mastiffs are given names like Takruk, the tiger cub, or Dombu, the young bear, in the case of a black dog.

The average life span of an Apso is 14 to 16 years. A puppy attains its full maturity in a year's time. The dieting determines its growth affecting the size. To keep the Apso to the minimum size, Tibetans feed a puppy with little quantities of meat, vegetables, tsampa, milk and meat soup. Mastiffs are given whey to deepen their voices, along with tsampa, butter, cheese, meat and bones. They also drink milk and chang. Shakhis are given meat and not too much liquid to keep them slim and fast. Apsos should not be fed salty food.

In Tibet dogs are not given baths regularly but once in two months or so during summer the body of the dog is rubbed with moistened sand in order to make its fur soft and shiny. Clipping of hair is not done generally but combing and brushing occasionally.

A well cared-for dog is considered even more fortunate than many human beings. There is a saying that though the life of a dog is the result of bad *karma* in its previous life, the good time that it enjoys keeps it from commiting sins in this one.